Shaping Public Opinion

**Time Required**

Four class periods, and an additional two weeks for the preparation and presentation of individual plans

**Key Concepts**

Civic Engagement

Public Policy

Politics

Political Party

Interest Group

Media

**Instructional Objectives**

Students will:

* Use the legacy of sugar as a guide as they explore various avenues used historically to shape public opinion and to create reforms in the status quo
* Devise and implement a plan to address a societal problem by engaging either the political process or the public policy process
* Select a political party or interest group to address a civic issue, identify a type of media as a means of communication, then defend the viability of the choices made in an effort to achieve a successful result in resolving the civic issue

**Introduction**

Students can engage in societal problems and participate in opportunities to contribute to the common good through governmental and nongovernmental channels. Opportunities for civic engagement with the structures of government are made possible through political and public policy processes. Political parties, interest groups and the media provide opportunities for civic involvement through various means.

**Resources**

*Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Spice, Magic, Slavery, Freedom, and Science* by Marc Aronson and Marina Budhos

Computer Lab

“Source Analysis” questionnaire

Projector

**Procedures**

A. Have students examine images in the book such as the Anti-slavery bag. Discuss the power these images had in shaping public opinion at a time when it was dangerous to do so.

B. Have students examine images from:

* The Abolition Project Website at <http://abolition.e2bn.org/index.php> features items such as:  Title page of children’s poem The Negro Boys Tale by Amelia Opie, Quaker Petition <http://abolition.e2bn.org/source_34.html>, Audio recreation of Wilberforce speech <http://gallery.e2bn.org/audio75760-abolition.html> ,  Audio Recreation of Thomas Clarkson Essay <http://gallery.e2bn.org/audio75467-abolition.html>
* Colonial Williamsburg website’s Am I Not a Man/Sister objects at <http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume2/february04/iotm.cfm>,
* PortCities website at <http://www.portcities.org.uk/> including Model of Liverpool Slave Ship The Brookes <http://www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/showImageDetails.php?sit_id=1&img_id=654>,  Satirical Handbill of Slave Article Auction <http://www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/showImageDetails.php?sit_id=1&img_id=716>,  Uncle Tom and Little Eva Figurine <http://www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/showImageDetails.php?sit_id=1&img_id=577>, Pamphlet <http://www.mersey-gateway.org/server.php?show=conMediaFile.1457>,
* Cowper’s Negro’s Complaint was put to music and was a staple at abolitionist meetings in England and, later, as recalled by Frederick Douglass, in the U.S.  Emilie George includes “Negroes Complaint” on her album, The Stars and Lily: French-American Influences and Interaction in Colonial Times in Song.  The 1:41 minute song may be downloaded from Amazon or iTunes, or students can review a 30 second clip for free.

Students will choose any too sources and answer the following questions on the “Source Analysis” questionnaire.

 What is the item?

 Is it primarily visual, verbal, or fairly well balanced?

 Who created this item?

 When?

 Who is the intended audience for this item?

 How is it intended to turn opinion against slavery?

 Rate its effectiveness as a tool for promoting the abolition of slavery

C. Students will select a civic issue that they believe is an area in need of change

D. Students will use the internet to locate five sources of information about their civic issue

E. Using a “Source Analysis” questionnaire, the students will answer the following questions about their sources:

* What is the item?
* Is it primarily visual, verbal, or fairly well balanced?
* Who created this item?
* When?
* Who is the intended audience for this item?
* How is it intended to help form opinions about the issue?
* Rate its effectiveness as a tool for promoting the issue.
* What, if any, media techniques are employed? (e.g. card stacking, plain folk, testimonial)
* What type of message is used (e.g. logical argument, ad hominem attack, positive image)

F. Students will then devise a plan to address the civic issue. They must either use the political process (e.g. work for the introduction of legislation, electing a candidate that supports their cause, petition to put an issue on the ballot), or the public policy process (e.g. public relations campaign, form/work with an interest group)

G. Students will present their plan to class via medium of their choice (e.g. Powerpoint, Prezi, Tri-fold, video ad, audio ad, persuasive speech, etc)

**Assessments**

“Source Analysis” questionnaires (materials related to sugar and slavery)

“Source Analysis” questionnaires (materials related to their own civic issue)

Shaping Public Opinion Plan (Substance)

Shaping Public Opinion Plan (Presentation)